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**Forty-first Meeting of Heads of  
National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies,  
Asia and the Pacific**

Bangkok, 27-30 November 2017

Item 3 of the provisional agenda\*\*

**Major regional drug trafficking trends and  
countermeasures\*\*\*****Regional and subregional cooperation in South Asia,  
East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific****Note by the Secretariat****I. Introduction: overview of main trends**

1. According to recent estimates by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Asia has the world's largest market for opiates and amphetamine-type and prescription stimulants. In 2015, approximately 10.8 million users of opiates lived in Asia, accounting for approximately 61 per cent of all users of opiates in the world (17.7 million). With regard to amphetamine-type and prescription stimulants, in 2015 Asia was home to 20.7 million users, representing roughly 56 per cent of the global total (37 million).
2. Heroin and methamphetamine continue to be the major illicit drug threats in Asia and the Pacific. Most indicators suggest that the illicit manufacture of, traffic in and use of methamphetamine in tablet and crystalline forms have expanded continuously in recent years. Meanwhile, Asia has continued to account for almost all opium poppy cultivation in the world in recent years.
3. Transnational criminal groups, mainly from Asia and the Americas, continue to use the Pacific island countries and territories as hubs for the trans-shipment of illicit drugs, including cocaine and methamphetamine and its precursor chemicals, primarily en route to Australia and New Zealand.
4. The data on seizure, manufacture and use indicate that there is no sign of a slowdown in the expansion of the methamphetamine market in East and South-East Asia. A total of 64 tons of methamphetamine were seized in the region in 2015, surpassing seizures in North America for the first time. The scale of methamphetamine manufacture in the region has been rising to meet the demand.

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\* Available only in English, which is the working language of the subsidiary body.

\*\* [UNODC/HONLAP/41/1](#).

\*\*\* Data for 2016 and the first half of 2017 used in the present document are preliminary and may be subject to change.



5. A growing range of new psychoactive substances, including synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones, continue to emerge on illicit markets across the region, even though, with the exception of ketamine, the use of these substances remains limited.
6. In recent years, and with the exception of Indonesia, the availability of “ecstasy” in East and South-East Asia has remained limited compared with methamphetamine.
7. Drug trafficking in South Asia is largely attributed to both external and internal factors. One of the primary external factors is the close proximity to the major opium-producing regions of South-West and South-East Asia (the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle, respectively). The main internal factors related to opioids are the presence of illicit cultivation of opium poppy and the diversion of opium originating from licit sources to illicit use.
8. In recent years, the South Asia region has experienced the impact of the increasing use of the southern route, as evidenced by larger than usual seizures of Afghan heroin, in particular in Sri Lanka. The key drug-related challenges facing South Asia include the traffic in Afghan heroin and the rise in methamphetamine manufacturing and trafficking; the diversion of controlled substances from licit to illicit channels; the smuggling of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, mainly from India to neighbouring countries; and the insufficient coordination capacity between regional anti-drug enforcement entities. Synthetic drugs are now replacing the natural and semi-synthetic drugs that have been abused for decades. Increasing evidence shows the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs containing narcotics drugs and psychotropic substances and their diversion to illicit markets.
9. South Asia continues to be targeted by organized criminal groups as a source of precursors, in particular ephedrine and pseudoephedrine for the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) in the region and in Oceania. Over the past years, in India, enforcement agencies have detected and dismantled many clandestine laboratories that were manufacturing ATS. The investigations have revealed foreign operatives collaborating with Indian counterparts.

## II. Detailed assessment of production and trafficking trends

10. Pacific island countries are increasingly used as a transit point. Methamphetamine and precursor chemicals from Asia and cocaine from the Americas are trafficked to and through Pacific island countries. In addition, Pacific countries are used for producing methamphetamine. For example, the national authorities of Vanuatu detected a clandestine methamphetamine laboratory in 2016, while the national authorities of Indonesia recently detected methamphetamine trafficked from Papua New Guinea into Indonesia.
11. In recent years, large quantities of ATS, with the exception of 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), have been seized at the Australian border. Although the quantity seized in 2015-2016 (2,620.6 kg) was lower than during the previous reporting period, it was still the second largest on record. While drug trafficking groups from Asia remain a major threat, outlaw motorcycle gangs have started playing a significant role in the traffic in crystalline methamphetamine and other drugs into the country.
12. In New Zealand, quantities of methamphetamine seized increased significantly, from 15 kg in 2013 to 400 kg in 2015. The largest quantities of methamphetamine seized at the border in 2015 originated in China (including Hong Kong, China), accounting for nearly 60 per cent of all seized quantities, followed by methamphetamine originating in Mexico, which accounted for 28 per cent. Meanwhile, the number of illicit methamphetamine manufacturing facilities dismantled in New Zealand has decreased continuously in recent years.

13. A comparison of seizure data between 2006 and 2015 indicates the rapid expansion of methamphetamine seizures in East and South-East Asia, whereas heroin seizures seem to have stabilized in recent years. During the period from 2006 to 2015, annual seizures of methamphetamine increased more than fivefold, while heroin seizures increased by 75 per cent only. According to preliminary data for 2016, countries in East and South-East Asia seized about 68 tons of methamphetamine, representing a record year.

14. With the exception of Thailand, all countries in the Greater Mekong subregion have observed consecutive increases in the use of methamphetamine tablets in recent years. Furthermore, with the exception of Indonesia and Japan, all countries in East and South-East Asia observed an increase in crystalline methamphetamine use in 2015. In Cambodia, China, the Philippines, Singapore and Viet Nam, that increase has been continuous in recent years.

15. With more than 34 tons seized in the region in 2015, seizures of crystalline methamphetamine reached a record high. Countries in the Greater Mekong subregion accounted for about 75 per cent of all such seizures between 2011 and 2015. According to preliminary figures for 2016, seizures of crystalline methamphetamine in the region amounted to 30 tons.

16. In 2016, nearly 330 million methamphetamine tablets were seized in East and South-East Asia, almost all of them in the Greater Mekong subregion. Neighbouring countries in the subregion, such as Bangladesh and Malaysia, have seized increasing quantities of tablets in recent years.

17. The retail prices of crystalline methamphetamine in some countries in East Asia and Oceania are comparatively high. Those prices may drive traffickers within and outside the region to expand their operations into such high-income countries as Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea. In recent years, the retail price of a methamphetamine tablet has decreased in United States dollar terms in several countries in East and South-East Asia, including Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore.

18. The average purity of tablets found in East and South-East Asia seems to be relatively stable. For example, 3,139 samples of crystalline methamphetamine analysed in China in 2016 had an average purity of 94 per cent. Thailand also reported that the vast majority (89 per cent) of samples analysed in the country in 2015 had a purity of more than 90 per cent. Crystalline methamphetamine seized in four maritime South-East Asian countries (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore) in 2015 had a purity of 70-80 per cent.

19. An increase in the popularity of synthetic drugs in China has been reported: more than 80 per cent of newly registered drug users in 2015 and 2016 were using synthetic drugs, indicating that those drugs have replaced opiates as the primary drug group of concern in the country. By the end of 2016, there were nearly 2.5 million registered drug users in China.

20. A large number of clandestine synthetic drug manufacturing facilities are dismantled each year in China, most of which manufacture crystalline methamphetamine or ketamine. In 2016, a total of 438 illicit manufacturing facilities were dismantled, the majority of which (358) were manufacturing methamphetamine. Most seizures of clandestine drug laboratories continued to take place in Guangdong and Sichuan Provinces. A total of 136 drug manufacturing facilities were dismantled during the first half of 2017. In 2016, 36.6 tons of methamphetamine were seized in China. Multi-ton seizures of ketamine have been reported each year since 2007 in that country, with approximately 10.4 tons of the drug seized in 2016.

21. Seizures of ketamine in East and South-East Asia in 2015 amounted to 20.4 tons, the largest quantity reported in the region since monitoring started. In 2015, China (including Hong Kong, China) accounted for 99 per cent of the quantity of ketamine seized in the region. However, other countries in the region, including Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand, reported relatively large quantities of ketamine seized in

2016. Malaysia also dismantled the first clandestine ketamine laboratory ever detected on its territory.

22. Crystalline methamphetamine remains the primary drug of concern in Japan. In 2016, nearly 1.5 tons of the drug were seized in the country. The steep increase in seized quantity of that drug in 2016 is due to the seizures of several large shipments originating overseas. For example, the national authorities of Japan seized 600 kg and 154 kg of crystalline methamphetamine in May and July 2016, respectively. Both cases involved trafficking groups from Taiwan Province of China.

23. In recent years, drug trafficking groups from Taiwan Province of China have been playing a significant role in methamphetamine manufacturing and trafficking in the region. For example, in July 2017, the national authorities of Indonesia seized 1 ton of methamphetamine from a transnational drug trafficking group from Taiwan Province of China.

24. Since 2012, comparatively large quantities of crystalline methamphetamine have been seized in the Republic of Korea, and a large number of new psychoactive substances have also been detected in the country in recent years. New psychoactive substances identified in 2015 included NBOMe compounds, such as 2CC-NBOMe, as well as synthetic cannabinoids, such as 5F-AKB-48 and AB-FUBINACA 2-fluorobenzyl isomer.

25. There is strong evidence that the scale of methamphetamine production in the Golden Triangle has been intensified. The national authorities of Myanmar seized more than 2 tons of crystalline methamphetamine both in 2015 and 2016, whereas average annual seizures of the drug between 2012 and 2014 amounted to less than 220 kg. In addition, seizures of methamphetamine tablets and crystalline methamphetamine in Thailand during the first half of 2017 already surpassed amounts seized in 2016.

26. In Myanmar, seizures of methamphetamine in tablet and crystalline forms reached a new peak in 2016 with 98.4 million and 2.46 tons, respectively. The country continues to be a major source of methamphetamine and heroin in the Greater Mekong subregion, the majority of which are manufactured in Shan State. There are indications that, in addition to pseudoephedrine-based and ephedrine-based methods, 1-phenyl-2-propanone (P-2-P)-based methods are used to manufacture methamphetamine in the country.

27. Methamphetamine trafficking and use continue to be the main drug-related concern in Thailand. A large majority of methamphetamine tablets found there and 90 per cent of crystalline methamphetamine seized in Thailand originate along the border with Myanmar. During the first half of 2017, the national authorities of Thailand seized more than 120 million methamphetamine tablets and 3.5 tons of crystalline methamphetamine, which represent unprecedented amounts.

28. According to the latest drug use survey conducted in the Philippines, there are an estimated 1.8 million drug users in the country. After cannabis, crystalline methamphetamine was the most widely used drug, accounting for approximately half of the current drug users. Nearly 2.5 tons of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in 2016, the largest amount in the past decade.

29. The availability and use of methamphetamine in tablet and crystalline forms continue to expand in Cambodia. In recent years, the total number of arrests for drug-related offences in Cambodia has increased by almost sixfold, from 1,788 in 2012 to 9,933 in 2016.

30. At 150 kg, the quantity of crystalline methamphetamine seized in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2016 was the highest ever reported in the country. Between 2006 and 2012, no seizures of crystalline methamphetamine were reported in that country.

31. Substantial quantities of crystalline methamphetamine have been seized in Indonesia in recent years. After reporting a record quantity of 4,420 kg of seized

crystalline methamphetamine in 2015, the national authorities of Indonesia seized 2,630 kg of the drug in 2016, representing a 40 per cent decrease but, still, the second largest quantity reported by that country. Between 2012 and 2016, however, the number of arrests related to crystalline methamphetamine more than doubled, from about 16,000 to 39,230 persons.

32. In 2016, a total of 3,265 drug users were arrested in Singapore, of whom 1,956 (60 per cent) used methamphetamine and 1,041 (32 per cent) used heroin. In 2016, 18.3 kg of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in the country, that is, a decrease of approximately 24 per cent compared with 2014 (12.5 kg), and of 65 per cent compared with 2013 (44.1 kg). The amount of crystalline methamphetamine destined for the domestic market, however, has been on the rise in recent years.

33. The synthetic drug market in Viet Nam continues to expand and diversify, and crystalline methamphetamine use, in particular, seems to be on the increase across the country. In 2016, the national authorities of that country dismantled three illicit synthetic drug manufacture facilities and seized 5 kg of synthetic cannabinoids and a certain amount of methamphetamine and “ecstasy”.

34. In Brunei Darussalam, crystalline methamphetamine is the primary drug of concern, followed by cannabis. The vast majority (94 per cent) of persons arrested for drug use in the country in 2016 were known to have used crystalline methamphetamine. Cannabis, ketamine and nimetazepam are also widely used.

35. While heroin remains the most commonly used drug in Malaysia, the use of methamphetamine has been rapidly increasing in the country. The number of treatment admissions for the use of the drug increased more than fivefold between 2012 and 2016, from about 540 to 3,020. The traffic in methamphetamine into Malaysia for domestic use and as a transit country remains a significant problem. In 2016, the national authorities of Malaysia arrested 8,160 foreign nationals for drug-related offences.

36. Data on seized laboratories suggest that the manufacture of “ecstasy” is not widespread in East and South-East Asia. In 2016, approximately 3.2 million “ecstasy” tablets were seized, mostly in China and Malaysia. Tablets sold as “ecstasy” in the region contain various substances other than 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, including new psychoactive substances.

37. Malaysia has been perceived as one of the major embarkation points for the “ecstasy” found in Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia in recent years. The law enforcement authorities of Hong Kong, China, reported “ecstasy” trafficking flows from mainland China and the Netherlands in 2015. Indonesia also indicated that the Netherlands was one of the major embarkation points for “ecstasy” seized on its territory in 2015. Some shipments with higher quality of “ecstasy” seized in the region were believed to have been trafficked from Canada, Germany and the United States of America.

38. Opium poppy cultivation in the Golden Triangle rose steadily until 2013, reaching 57,800 ha that year, and stabilized at high levels in 2014 and 2015. In 2015, the total area under opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar was 55,500 ha. The vast majority of cultivation took place in Shan State, accounting for 91 per cent of all cultivation nationwide. In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, areas under opium poppy cultivation were estimated at 5,700 ha. The amount of heroin seized in 2016 in East and South-East Asia shows that opium poppy cultivation in the Golden Triangle remained at high levels in 2016.

39. Heroin remains a drug of major concern in some countries, including Malaysia, Myanmar and Viet Nam. In 2015, increasing use trends were detected in Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam, whereas other countries in the region observed either stable or decreasing use trends. In 2016, 11 tons of heroin were seized in East and South-East Asia, 95 per cent of which was seized in the Mekong countries.

40. Cocaine seizures in Asia increased from 0.4 tons in 1998 to 1.2 tons in 2014 and 1.7 tons in 2015. Overall, in 2015, quantities of cocaine intercepted in Asia increased by more than 40 per cent from the previous year, with increases reported in all subregions. The trend continued in 2016, where countries in East and South-East Asia alone seized nearly 2.7 tons of cocaine.

41. The group of new psychoactive substances that has experienced the largest increase in terms of number of substances is the category of “other substances”, which, in East and South-East Asia, consists of several synthetic opioids and benzodiazepine derivatives, as well as a wide range of other substances. To date, there are no reports of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl analogues being sold to users in the region. There is a potential risk that traffickers supplying East and South-East Asia may try to cut heroin with those highly potent substances to increase their profit margins.

42. In Bangladesh, methamphetamine tablets have emerged as the major drug of abuse in the country. Tablets are smuggled into the country from Myanmar through its South-East border. Seizures have been consistently increasing, from 0.12 million tablets in 2009 to 29.4 million tablets in 2016.

43. Codeine-based cough syrups are widely abused in Bangladesh and are smuggled in large quantities from India through various land routes as well as river routes through the Sundarbans. Bangladesh has banned the production and sale of those syrups on its territory but, owing to its legal availability in India, they are being smuggled in large quantities. Easy availability, less perceived risks and compatibility with both smoking and non-smoking populations have led to their popularity among drug users in Bangladesh. The seizures of codeine-based cough syrups have been declining consistently since 2012, with the exception of 2015 when they reached a total of 860,429 bottles. The major reason for the declining seizures of those syrups is the continued cooperation between law enforcement agencies of the two countries to counter their smuggling.

44. The heroin abused in Bangladesh is mostly of crude and impure form, reddish to grey in colour, and with an estimated purity not exceeding 5 per cent when sold on the streets. Most of the heroin seized in Bangladesh is either manufactured in Afghanistan or India and smuggled from India. However, good-quality heroin sourced in the Golden Triangle area also sometimes enters the country by way of its south-eastern coastline, mostly for further shipment to Europe and America by sea. The upward trend in the seizure of heroin in the country continued in 2016, with an increase of more than 100 per cent from the previous year to reach 266.79 kg, as opposed to 108.74 kg in 2015.

45. Buprenorphine is one of the most popular injecting drugs of abuse in Bangladesh and is mainly smuggled from India. Pethidine was once the major injecting drug of abuse in Bangladesh. Owing to the emergence of buprenorphine and the very high price of pethidine, however, abuse of the latter has decreased. Pentazocine is also reported to be smuggled from India.

46. Cannabis is the most commonly abused drug in Bangladesh and is mainly smuggled into the country from India. The illicit cultivation of cannabis in the remote areas of Bangladesh has been reported. Seizures of cannabis in Bangladesh have been showing an upward trend since 2013, increasing from 40.9 tons in 2015 to 47.1 tons in 2016.

47. Traffic in and the illicit manufacturing of ATS in India appear to be increasing. The quantities of ATS seized and the number of seizures in India have been rising steadily over the past few years. In 2016, the quantities of ATS seized witnessed a tenfold increase over the previous year's figures. However, the increase of 1,000 per cent, to 1,687 kg, in 2016, compared with 166 kg in 2015, is mainly due to the dismantling of two manufacturing facilities involved in the illicit manufacturing of those substances.

48. After registering a decline from 2007 to 2011, heroin seizures in India have been increasing since 2014. In 2016, they were reported to be 1,674 kg, compared with 1,461 kg in 2015, making it the largest amount of seized heroin reported in the past 20 years.

49. The downward trend in opium seizures in India that had been witnessed since 2012 came to a halt in 2016. While 1,687 kg of opium were seized in 2015, seized quantities increased by more than 30 per cent in 2016, to 2,251 kg. The number of seizures also increased from 860 to 933 during the same period. At the same time, the quantities of morphine seized witnessed a decline, from 61 kg in 2015 to 28 kg in 2016.

50. In 2015, the destruction of illicit opium poppy crop by national agencies in India rose by almost 90 per cent, from 3,461 acres in 2015 to 6,512 acres in 2016. The illicitly cultivated area destroyed in 2016 was the largest in the past five years, but significantly lower than the 14,366 acres destroyed in 2011.

51. While an increase in cocaine trafficking in India can be reported, cocaine is one of the major drugs for which seizures witnessed a decline in 2016. The quantities of cocaine seized in 2016 in India witnessed a sharp decline, from 113 kg in 2015 to 28 kg in 2016, even though the number of seizures declined by 20 per cent only, from 100 cases in 2015 to 81 cases in 2016.

52. In 2016, the quantity of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine seized in India witnessed a sharp rise, from 827 kg in 2015 to 21,272 kg in 2016. This increase can be attributed to one single seizure of more than 20,000 kg of ephedrine made from a manufacturing facility alleged to be involved in the clandestine manufacturing of ATS. On that occasion, 2,661 litres of acetic anhydride were also seized. Seizures of pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine trafficked from India into Myanmar for extracting the precursors continued to be reported.

53. Cannabis is the major narcotic drug seized in India. While there are no estimates of the cultivation and production of cannabis in India, substantial quantities of cannabis are trafficked into India from Nepal. Another noticeable trend is the traffic in cannabis from north-eastern states to eastern and other states, by surface transport. On average, Indian law enforcement agencies seize about 100 tons of cannabis annually. In 2016, however, both the quantities of cannabis seized and the number of cannabis seizures in the country rose sharply to 294 tons in 14,394 cases, compared with 94.4 tons in 8,130 cases in 2015 the largest quantity of cannabis seized in the past 15 years.

54. Hashish seizures declined from 3,349 kg in 2015 to 2,786 kg in 2016, whereas the number of seizures increased by 10 per cent compared with 2015, to reach 2,562 cases in 2016. In addition to domestic production, Nepal is a major source of hashish trafficked into India.

55. The year 2016 witnessed a record seizure of 23.5 tons of methaqualone, seized in one single case in India. The drug was seized by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence from a clandestine factory situated in the State of Rajasthan, on the western border of India. The drug was manufactured and stored in a secret room concealed behind a wall and is believed to have been destined for transport to markets in Africa, in particular Mozambique and South Africa.

56. Cannabis is also the most common drug abused in Bhutan. It is smuggled into the country from India, along with small quantities of low-quality heroin.

57. The abuse of pharmaceutical drugs, in particular benzodiazepines, such as diazepam and nitrazepam, that contain controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances is posing an increasing threat in Bhutan. The abuse of codeine-based cough syrups has also been reported. The pharmaceutical drugs are mainly smuggled from India.

58. Pharmaceutical opioids, such as buprenorphine and codeine-based preparations, and the benzodiazepine class of drugs, including diazepam and nitrazepam, are

commonly trafficked and abused in Nepal. They are reported to be smuggled into Nepal from India. In 2016, the seizures of commonly abused injecting pharmaceutical preparations increased and were reported to amount to 25,000 ampoules of buprenorphine and 35,000 ampoules of diazepam, compared with 19,000 ampoules of buprenorphine and 25,000 ampoules of diazepam in 2015.

59. There have been a number of small seizures of ATS, such as amphetamines and methamphetamines, in Nepal in the recent past. Some quantities of methamphetamine tablets are being smuggled into the country from Thailand. No illicit ATS manufacturing facility has been reported by Nepal to date. However, with the increasing air connectivity of Nepal to various destinations abroad, authorities need to implement strict controls over the smuggling of ATS from abroad for both domestic consumption and transit purposes.

60. Heroin from South-West and South-East Asia is smuggled into Nepal through its land border with India and from India, Myanmar and Pakistan through the international airport in Kathmandu. Traffickers use Nepal as a transit country to smuggle heroin into destination markets, such as Australia, Hong Kong, China, and the Netherlands. Seizures indicate that low-quality heroin is smuggled in small quantities from India mainly for domestic consumption purposes. Heroin trafficking operations in Nepal are believed to be run by both Nepalese and foreign citizens. Heroin seizures in Nepal declined from 6.3 kg in 2015 to 3.7 kg in 2016. To date, no illicit heroin manufacturing facility has been detected in Nepal.

61. There is also evidence of illicit opium poppy cultivation in Nepal. No extensive survey has been carried out to determine its extent, but cultivation in small patches has been reported in remote hilly areas. According to the national authorities of Nepal, illicit opium is smuggled into India. In 2016, seizures of opium in Nepal increased significantly to 64 kg, compared with 9.8 kg in 2015.

62. The upward trend in seizures of cocaine in Nepal continued in 2016. Since the first detected case of cocaine trafficking in Nepal in 2012, there has been an increase in such seizures. In 2016, 11.67 kg of cocaine were thus seized, which is marginally higher than the 11 kg seized in 2014.

63. Nepal continues to be a source country for traffic in hashish in the region, which is smuggled into India through various land routes. Hashish is also trafficked by air from Kathmandu to various destinations in Europe, Canada, Hong Kong, China, Japan, the Russian Federation, Thailand, the United States and other countries. Throughout 2016, there were reports of hashish seizures at Kathmandu international airport.

64. In 2016, the quantities of cannabis and hashish seized by the national authorities of Nepal decreased by around 21 per cent to 6,407 kg, compared with 8,159 kg in 2015. Nevertheless, the total seizure of 2,900 kg of cannabis reported up to April 2017 points towards an increase in traffic in 2017.

65. Sri Lanka is close to two major illicit opiate-producing regions of the world, the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent, thus attracting the attention of international drug traffickers. Cannabis and heroin are the major illicit drugs of abuse in Sri Lanka. Cannabis is the only plant-based drug which is illicitly cultivated in the country. Cannabis seizures in Sri Lanka have been declining since 2011, when 203 tons of cannabis were seized, to 81.9 tons in 2013 and 6.56 tons in 2015. The downward trend continued in 2016, with seizures amounting to 4.17 tons.

66. Heroin is the second most common drug of abuse in Sri Lanka, even though heroin and other opiates are not manufactured in that country. After relatively large seizures of more than 300 kg of heroin in both 2013 and 2014, the quantities seized in the country declined sharply to 46.6 kg in 2015. In 2016, however, seizures surged significantly, by almost fivefold, to 207 kg. The main trafficking routes are sea routes from southern India (for Indian heroin) and Pakistan (for Afghan heroin). The preferred route for contraband smuggling from southern India into Sri Lanka has been the sea lanes between the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait, in particular through



the port of Tuticorin in southern India. Bulk quantities of heroin arrive by sea with the support of fishermen working in tandem with drug smugglers from southern India.

67. Although synthetic drugs and precursor chemicals are not manufactured in Sri Lanka, the use of ATS, including methamphetamine and “ecstasy”, and of other synthetic drugs, such as lysergic acid diethylamide and ketamine, is reportedly on the rise in the country.

68. In Sri Lanka, abuse of pharmaceutical drugs, including benzodiazepines, such as diazepam and clonazepam, barbiturates, prescription opioids, such as tramadol, and codeine-based preparations has been reported.

69. In 2016, the national authorities of Sri Lanka seized 928 kg of cocaine at Colombo seaport, concealed in a container used for a consignment of timber from Ecuador. The consignment was en route to India and was being trans-shipped through Colombo when the seizure was made. This is the largest seizure of cocaine ever made in the history of South Asia by any law enforcement agency. Apart from this, a few other cases of seizures involving around 500 kg of cocaine and trafficked in containerized cargo originating in Latin America were made by the national authorities of Sri Lanka in 2016.

70. The maritime southern route is gaining importance in South Asia as some of the largest heroin seizures outside the source region have been made on that route. In the recent past, seizures of heroin in Maldives further confirmed the increasing pattern of heroin trafficking in small boats and dhows to landing points in southern Asia in addition to the countries on the eastern coast of Africa. In 2016, 46.88 kg of heroin were reported to be seized in Maldives, which is significantly more than the seized quantity reported in 2015. Maldives has also emerged as a transit point for drugs trafficking. Drug smuggling into Maldives takes place through seaports and airports. Expatriate workers in Maldives are often used as carriers and peddlers for trafficking.

71. The types of drug available for abuse have increased in Maldives, although heroin and hashish oil remain the most common drugs used by the majority of drug users in the country. In 2016, approximately 5 kg of cocaine were seized in Maldives, which is significantly more than the seized quantity reported in 2015, as well as 67.393 kg of cannabis and hashish.

### **III. International cooperation**

#### **A. Regional conferences and meetings on drug control**

72. The twenty-first Asia-Pacific Operational Drug Enforcement Conference was held in Japan in February 2017 to discuss the current drug situation in the Asia-Pacific region. The aim of the conference was to strengthen international cooperation, with a special focus on transnational criminal groups trafficking methamphetamine and new psychoactive substances into the region.

73. The twenty-seventh Anti-Drug Liaison Officials’ Meeting for International Cooperation was held in the Republic of Korea, in September 2017, with the participation of representatives of countries from Asia and the Pacific and Europe, as well as UNODC. Participants discussed emerging challenges posed by illicit drugs, including potent new psychoactive substances identified in the region.

74. The fourth operational workshop of the Drug Monitoring Network of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was held in Thailand, from 30 July to 1 August 2017, with the participation of all ASEAN member States as well as its dialogue partners, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. The workshop was aimed at sharing recent illicit drug data and promoting technical cooperation among participating countries.

75. The thirty-eighth meeting of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters and its related meetings were held in Viet Nam in July 2017. Participating countries

reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation at the regional level in the framework of the ASEAN Workplan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs 2016-2025.

76. The seventeenth ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime and its related meetings were held in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in May 2017, with the participation of 10 ASEAN member States, their partners and UNODC. Participants discussed ways to address transnational crimes, including drug trafficking, and to promote ASEAN cooperation in fighting crime. In addition, the representatives of the ASEAN member States reviewed the current implementation status of the Meeting's workplan for 2016-2018.

77. The ninth Asia Forensic Science Network Annual Meeting and Symposium were held in Singapore in September 2017 on the theme of advancing forensic science in a rapidly changing world. The meeting provided a forum for forensic experts from Asia and other regions and UNODC to learn about and discuss the latest advancements in forensic science, including measures to better detect and identify new psychoactive substances.

## **B. Cooperation between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Governments of the region**

78. In 2015, the UNODC regional office for South Asia conducted expert assessments of pharmaceutical drugs containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in Bhutan and Maldives. The key objectives of the assessments were: (a) to assess the nature and extent of the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs in the region; (b) to assess the adequacy of prevalent legal and policy regimes governing the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs in the region; and (c) to assess the organizational, regulatory and enforcement capacities of the concerned agencies; and (d) to identify gaps in the legal regime and their organizational capacity.

79. At the subregional level, UNODC fosters partnerships in the framework of the memorandum of understanding on drug control in the Greater Mekong subregion of 1993. In May 2017, ministers and officials from Mekong countries and representatives of UNODC gathered in Phnom Penh to endorse a new action plan developed in line with the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in 2016, with the view to addressing regional drug challenges. During the meeting, the ministers endorsed the Phnom Penh Joint Declaration on Effectively Addressing the Drug Problem in the Region. The Declaration reaffirms the determination to address drug challenges under the international conventions dealing with drug issues, while connecting the Action Plan with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

80. In November 2016, senior government officials, international and civil society partners active across the Greater Mekong subregion and representatives of the Myanmar Peace Center, the Thai Royal Project and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation convened in Louangphrabang in the Lao People's Democratic Republic to consider new development strategies to address the opium economy. The symposium focused on the theme of addressing the drug economy through wider development agendas and followed up on the recent political commitment of the six countries signatories to the Mekong memorandum of understanding to exploring ways to better link drug control measures with regional development plans.

81. In March and April 2017, police senior officials from the six signatory countries and UNODC completed a week-long drug and precursor trafficking assessment of the east-west economic corridor that connects Viet Nam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Myanmar. For the first time, in-depth inspections were conducted of roads, bridges, checkpoints, border crossings and front-line capacity along the primary economic corridor transecting the Mekong.

82. The annual meeting of the Senior Officials Committee provided for in the Mekong memorandum of understanding was held in Phnom Penh, in January 2017. On that occasion, in addition to reviewing overall progress with regard to the implementation of the memorandum of understanding, participants developed a new two-year plan to address the regional drug situation, which was then endorsed at the ministerial-level meeting, in May 2017.

83. With support from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, UNODC prepared a report entitled “Transnational Organized Crime in the Pacific: A Threat Assessment”, which was launched in late 2016. This was the first United Nations report to examine major trafficking flows and issues in the Pacific, following a call made during an open debate of the Security Council in 2015 to address security threats to fragile small island States.

84. As a follow-up to that report, the UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat organized two national technical workshops for Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, respectively. Those workshops brought together representatives of various national authorities and civil society organizations involved in the fight against illicit drugs, to discuss measures to improve their data collection capacity.

85. A high-level drug policy symposium of ASEAN countries and China was held in November 2016. The symposium was organized following the commitment by nine countries in the region (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) in 2015 to moving from compulsory detention treatment towards voluntary community-based treatment. UNODC developed a comprehensive training package to strengthen the capacity of community health centres to work with drug users.

86. The SMART Programme organized its annual regional workshop in Viet Nam in August 2017. The workshop was attended by representatives of all ASEAN member States, neighbouring countries in East Asia and the Pacific, Australia, Canada, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the United States and the European Union.

87. UNODC, in partnership with the World Customs Organization, has been implementing the Global Container Control Programme to strengthen the capacity of eight countries in South-East Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) to stop the traffic in illicit goods, including drugs and precursors, at seaports.

88. In December 2016, the third and final round of drug policy consultations was convened by the Ministry of Home Affairs of Myanmar, the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control of the police force of that country and UNODC in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, laying the foundation for the introduction of a new drug policy and related legal reforms in that country in 2017.

89. In June 2017, the Government of Myanmar convened in Nay Pyi Taw a special national conference to mark the celebration of the twenty-ninth International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking with speeches, displays and activities highlighting the impact of drugs on public health and security in the country and surrounding region. The event was attended by the Vice-President, the Minister of Home Affairs, the Minister of Health and Sports, UNODC regional high-level representatives and experts and diplomats and was used to display findings of the *World Drug Report 2017* and the latest regional and national data.

90. In May 2017, enforcement, justice, economic and diplomatic senior officials from South-East Asia gathered at the seat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in Bangkok, to discuss regional integration and challenges posed by crime, as well as improvements to border management to help to secure the region. The meeting was organized by the Government of Thailand and UNODC and its key objective was to build up momentum for improving the management of regional borders to mitigate transnational crime.

91. Between 2014 and 2016, the Governments of Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka joined the Global Container Control Programme, which includes an air cargo component, with a view to enhancing capacity to counter traffic in illicit drugs and precursors through seaports and airports.

92. In 2015, workshops for law enforcement and civil society representatives were held in New Delhi and Assam, India, with the aim of promoting support for HIV medical care and treatment and support for high-risk populations, in particular injecting drug users. The workshops were also aimed at enhancing partnerships between law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations.

93. In 2016, to enhance the capacity of drug regulatory authorities, including drug law enforcement agencies, to counter diversion and internal and cross-border traffic in prescription drugs containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and their preparations, the UNODC regional office for South Asia, in collaboration with the trade and industry sectors, conducted expert assessments of pharmaceutical drugs containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The key objectives of the assessments were: (a) to assess the nature and extent of the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs in the region; (b) to assess the adequacy of prevalent legal and policy regimes governing the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs in the region; (c) to assess the organizational, regulatory and enforcement capacities of the concerned agencies; and (d) to identify gaps in the legal regime and their organizational capacity.

94. In 2016 and 2017, UNODC conducted training sessions in Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka aimed at building the capacity of law enforcement agencies to control traffic in pharmaceutical drugs containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. In addition, awareness-raising workshops were organized for representatives of the pharmaceutical trade and industry sectors to promote self-regulation and prevent the diversion and abuse of that type of drugs.

95. In 2017, UNODC launched a new initiative to strengthen the capacity of Member States to identify and respond effectively to transnational organized crime in the region by proposing the establishment of a regional cooperation and coordination mechanism, the South Asia Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre on Transnational Organized Crime, for which consultations are ongoing.

96. UNODC assisted Member States in South Asia with building the capacity of their forensic laboratories with regard to testing methods and the identification of new psychoactive substances and, accordingly, assisted key national laboratories in the region to register with the UNODC International Collaborative Exercises programme to allow them to assess their performance and take corrective actions, when appropriate.

97. In 2017, UNODC launched another project to reduce drug-related problems by facilitating and strengthening the engagement of law enforcement agencies with the drug users' community. The project will be implemented in close coordination with government officials in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar and Nepal.

98. In 2017, UNODC also began the implementation of a new project to strengthen cross-border cooperation between Bangladesh and Myanmar to counter trafficking.

### **C. National efforts and bilateral cooperation**

99. China continued its efforts to enhance the treatment and rehabilitation of drug users. By the end of 2015, 228,000 drug users had received community-based drug treatment and 91,000 drug users had benefited from rehabilitation services across the country. In addition, the Government of China developed and announced a workplan on community-based treatment and rehabilitation of drug users (2016-2020) to provide such services to a larger number of people.

100. Effective on 1 March 2017, China placed the synthetic opioids, carfentanil, furanylfentanyl, acrylfentanyl and valeryl fentanyl under national control by adding them to the list of substances regulated under the administrative measures on narcotics and psychotropic substances without medical use.

101. On 1 May 2017, the Central Bureau of Narcotics of Singapore incorporated five new psychoactive substances, including the synthetic opioid U-47700 and four synthetic cannabinoids (5F-MN-24, MDMB-CHMICA, NM-2201 and THJ-018) into the list of class A controlled drugs of the Misuse of Drugs Act. Nine new psychoactive substances were also added to the fifth schedule of the Act, which places them under temporary control. In its decision 60/2, In March 2017, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided to include U-47700 in Schedule I of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol.

102. The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has been implementing its new national drug policy, the national drug control master plan for 2016-2020. The plan comprises nine pillars, namely legislative improvement, drug use prevention and civic awareness, treatment, alternative development for communities cultivating illicit crops, creating a drug-free Lao People's Democratic Republic, law enforcement, international cooperation, monitoring and evaluation, and capacity-building for government staff.

103. The Government of the Philippines established an integrated drug monitoring and reporting information system. Developed to support policies and programmes managed by the Government, the web-based system is designed to collect, manage and analyse data and information relevant to drug use prevention.

104. The Government of Thailand has strengthened its effort to provide better services to drug users through its five-year national drug control plan. One of the plan's main objectives is to increase the accessibility and effectiveness of treatment services and sustainable demand reduction.

105. In December 2016, the National Narcotics Board of Indonesia and the Office of the Narcotics Control Board of Thailand signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen their partnership with regard to the control of illicit drugs and their precursor chemicals and drug use prevention.

## **D. Conclusions and recommendations**

106. The challenges posed by methamphetamine, heroin and related chemical precursors in East and South-East Asia are so significant that no single country can face them on its own.

107. Potential heroin production in Afghanistan and the Golden Triangle continued to increase and coincided with the increasing acreage devoted to opium poppy cultivation in both areas. The persistent demand for opiates, coupled with the lack of development assistance and alternative income sources for opium poppy growers, have been driving factors for the high levels of opium poppy cultivation.

108. Substantial amounts of illicitly produced precursor chemicals are being continuously diverted and trafficked within the region. Attributable in part to the booming chemical industry in the region, the wide availability of precursor chemicals for both synthetic drugs and opiates is a significant challenge for Member States.

109. Use of the Internet for drug trafficking, including the darknet, has emerged as a major challenge for law enforcement agencies worldwide. There is an urgent need to increase awareness of law enforcement agencies and policymakers about the need to develop adequate regulations regarding drug trafficking activities conducted over the Internet. A systematic capacity-building initiative for improving the knowledge and skills of law enforcement officers in relation to this issue is highly recommended.

110. In line with recommendations contained in the outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly (General Assembly resolution

S-30-1, annex), stronger coordination between drug demand reduction agencies and supply reduction agencies in South Asia is crucial, as is the strengthening of a balanced, health-centred approach to drug control.

111. National coordinating agencies in South Asia could share findings of trafficking patterns with other law enforcement agencies in their jurisdictions, as this would help them in strategizing. Such agencies could consider taking steps to increase the awareness of policymakers and law enforcement authorities about the problems and challenges that they face.

112. In some cases, enforcement agencies in Asia lack sufficient technical capacity and expertise to deal with issues such as new psychoactive substances, investigating drug trafficking activities conducted over the Internet, the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs and other issues. These agencies are also affected by a shortage of personnel trained to address those issues.

113. Furthermore, there is a need to educate people in South Asia about the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs, addressing outdated beliefs and removing prejudices that present barriers to rational use. Public education programmes that focus on the ill effects of misused pharmaceutical drugs should be further enhanced.

114. The medication dispensation system through pharmacies in South Asia needs to continue to be strengthened. To prevent the diversion of controlled medicines, their bar coding should be made mandatory to enable the tracing of medicines in the supply chain. There is an urgent need to increase the number of inspections so as to improve the monitoring and supervision of retail pharmacies.

115. Member States may wish to consider multilateral and multifaceted approaches to addressing challenges posed by illicit drugs and precursor chemicals in South-East Asia and the Pacific by, inter alia:

(a) Further strengthening efforts towards building awareness among the general public, especially young people and parents, about the growing public health concerns associated with the abuse of drugs (including pharmaceutical preparations), as well as promoting evidence-based prevention standards by engaging schools, families and communities;

(b) Increasing the capacity of national authorities to gather and share data and information on illicit drugs effectively, in particular the extent of drug use and its implications, such as drug-related deaths, as such data are largely unavailable;

(c) Improving data collection mechanisms used for estimating requirements for controlled medicines;

(d) Establishing a partnership with the pharmaceutical industry to control the diversion of pharmaceutical drugs and formalizing the terms of such a partnership by establishing coordination mechanisms at the national level that would bring together all relevant government agencies and the private trade and industry sectors, so as to facilitate the sharing of information and intelligence with trading partners, thereby leading to a better coordination of regulatory, medical and pharmaceutical practices;

(e) Strengthening relevant legal frameworks to reflect current developments in illicit drug markets and, for those Member States that have not yet done so, ratifying or acceding to the international drug control treaties and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime;

(f) Enhancing the knowledge and skills of law enforcement officers, in particular in countries with limited resources and capacity, to investigate and prosecute drug trafficking offences more efficiently, through the provision of appropriate training on drug and precursor trafficking, as well as specialized training initiatives, including on the use of the Internet for drug trafficking purposes;

(g) Continuing to strengthen coordination and cooperation between national enforcement and regulatory agencies to facilitate the sharing of information and ensure the effective implementation of laws, regulations, policies and programmes;

(h) Enhancing support for mechanisms for cross-border and regional cooperation on drug matters, including relevant sectoral bodies of ASEAN, the memorandum of understanding on drug control in the Greater Mekong subregion and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat;

(i) Further strengthening the functions of the border liaison office mechanisms in order to interdict and act upon the movements of illicit drugs and precursors across land borders, through enhanced cross-border and inter-agency cooperation;

(j) Developing similar approaches in selected ports, by strengthening container control mechanisms and inter-agency cooperation, in order to improve the capacity to interdict maritime traffic in illicit drugs and related precursors by relevant port authorities;

(k) Further strengthening the capacity of national forensic laboratories to detect narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances;

(l) Enhancing drug and precursor identification and profiling capacity through the development of infrastructure, training and networking, including by engaging with the chemical industry;

(m) Strengthening regular and rapid intelligence and operational data sharing among law enforcement authorities in the region in order to respond to organized crime groups effectively through joint operations;

(n) Increasing investments in promoting evidence-based research and approaches, such as drug use surveys and thematic assessments (including among women in prisons), and strengthening data collection and analysis mechanisms, while collecting epidemiological data on an ongoing basis and sharing them among various agencies dealing with drug-related matters;

(o) Supporting the implementation of evidence-based drug use prevention policies and programmes;

(p) Strengthening appropriate intervention strategies through regular outreach programmes among the most vulnerable and at-risk populations, such as injecting drug users, who are particularly susceptible to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis B and C, as well as continuing to raise awareness among drug law enforcement officers regarding the needs of drug users and related health concerns;

(q) Transitioning, where applicable, from the model of compulsory drug treatment centres towards community and voluntary services, as such evidence-based approaches are more effective than incarceration to address the harmful consequences of drug abuse;

(r) Taking into account the specific needs and circumstances of women and girls in the context of the world drug problem.